

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Fact Sheet on EPA's Final Public Involvement Policy

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its Public Involvement Policy in April 2003. The Policy provides guidance and direction to EPA officials on reasonable and effective means to involve the public in its regulatory and program decisions.

The purposes of the Final Policy are to:

- Improve the acceptability, efficiency, feasibility and durability of the Agency's decisions
- Reaffirm EPA's commitment to early and meaningful public involvement
- Ensure that EPA makes its decisions with an understanding of the interests and concerns of affected people and entities
- Promote the use of a wide variety of techniques to create early and, when appropriate, continuing opportunity for public involvement in Agency decisions
- Establish clear and effective guidance for conducting public involvement activities

The Policy is not a rule and is not legally enforceable. It does not replace public participation requirements established by existing laws or regulations, but supplements those requirements and enables EPA to implement them in the most effective ways. It applies to all EPA programs and activities. In programs or activities where the public is already meaningfully involved, EPA can use this Policy to enhance that public involvement. Where the existing level of public involvement needs to improve, this Policy provides suggestions for how to move forward.

The new Policy replaces EPA's 1981 Public Participation Policy. In November 1999, the EPA requested public comment on whether and how to change that Policy, and subsequently began a process to revise it and develop an implementation strategy. In December 2000, EPA released a draft revised Public Involvement Policy for public comment. The comment period closed on July 31, 2001, following a two-week Internet-based dialogue on "Public Involvement in EPA Decisions," which included 1,144 participants from all 50 states. (EPA's response to comments on the draft policy is available at <http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/responsetocomments.pdf>.)

The Policy reflects important changes over the past 22 years: new and enhanced public involvement techniques; new options for public involvement through the Internet; EPA's emphasis on assuring compliance; increased use of partnerships and technical assistance; greatly expanded public access to information, and the increased capacity of states, tribes and local governments to carry out delegated programs.

Seven basic steps for effective public involvement in any decision or activity are the Policy's core:

1. Plan and budget for public involvement
2. Identify the interested and affected public
3. Consider providing technical or financial assistance to the public to facilitate involvement
4. Provide information and outreach to the public
5. Conduct public consultation and involvement activities
6. Review and use input and provide feedback
7. Evaluate public involvement

The Policy is posted on the EPA's web page at: www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/policy2003.pdf.